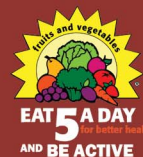


# Policy Brief

Vol. 1, September 2003 (reprinted May 2004)

Everyone in the Gold Coast communities enjoys an environment that support healthy eating & physical activity.



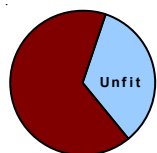
## A Health Crisis in Paradise

*Youth and Chronic Diseases in California's Gold Coast*

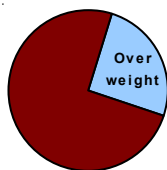
San Luis Obispo · Santa Barbara · Ventura

### Gold Coast FitnessGram 2001

Grades 5, 7 and 9



Over One-Third of Gold Coast Children Are Unfit (34-38.5%)



One-Quarter of Gold Coast Children Are Overweight (21.6-26.5%)

The Gold Coast—San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties—describes the Central California counties that hug the coastline. The Gold Coast region enjoys a temperate Mediterranean climate, provides multiple recreational opportunities in a clean environment, and produces a wealth of agricultural products. The Gold Coast is a leading producer of grapes, broccoli, strawberries, lettuce, cauliflower, avocados, celery, tomatoes, lemons, oranges, peas and vegetable crops, yielding a total gross agriculture production of more than \$2.2 billion a year.

Halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco, the Gold Coast region offers long sandy beaches and rocky coastline vistas, and combines traditionally rural areas with sophisticated

urban centers. This diversity of interests, cultures, geographies, communities and issues leads both to opportunities and challenges in building healthier Gold Coast communities.

Ironically, in spite of all of our regional opportunities for nutrition and outdoor activity, the Gold Coast region reflects national trends towards increased obesity\*, less physical activity, reduced nutrition education in schools, and competition from highly marketed, less-nutritious food choices. While the Gold Coast health figures are worrisome, the region presently fares better than many other parts of the state.

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*“One of the most significant concerns from a public health perspective is that we know a lot of children who are overweight grow up to be overweight or obese adults, and thus at greater risk for some major health problems such as heart disease and diabetes. One critical answer to this problem is that we all must work together to help our children make physical activity a life-long habit.”*

*Dr. Julie Gerberding, Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)*

### **“An Ounce of Prevention -- A Pound of Cure”**

A collaborative group representing over a dozen organizations in the Gold Coast has reviewed national, state, and county statistics. The goal of the Gold Coast Collaborative is to promote policies that will reverse these disturbing trends.

In times of reduced financial resources, it is better to organize actions that will prevent ill health than scramble to meet the far greater costs of treating intractable problems. In addressing the health of all Gold Coast citizens, the Collaborative has placed a special focus on the needs of children.

### **FOCUS ON OUR CHILDREN**

The crisis of childhood overweight\* is national. The dramatic growth in children's weight has prompted top health officials to label it an epidemic.

Since 1980, obesity\* rates have doubled among children and tripled among adolescents. Almost 15 percent of U.S. children and adolescents - about 9 million young people - are overweight.<sup>1</sup>

Since 70 to 80 percent of overweight teens become obese adults<sup>2</sup>, parents, school officials and policy-makers can appreciate the vital role they can play in impacting the nutrition and physical activity of children during these growing years.

Fitness data on page three provides a snapshot of the Gold Coast Counties' current standing in relation to the epidemic of childhood overweight and related health statistics.

### **\* TERMINOLOGY**

**Obesity** is generally only used to refer to adults.

**Body Mass Index (BMI)** is used differently for children and adults.

*In children and teens, BMI is used to assess underweight, overweight, and risk for overweight. Children's body fatness changes over the years as they grow. Also, girls and boys differ in their body fatness as they mature. This is why BMI for children, also referred to as BMI-for-age, is gender and age specific. BMI-for-age is plotted on gender specific growth charts. These charts are used for children and teens 2-20 years of age.*

**Underweight:** ..... BMI-for-age less than 5th percentile

**At Risk of Overweight:** ..... BMI-for-age 85th percentile to less than 95th percentile

**Overweight:** ..... BMI-for-age at or above the 95th percentile

<http://www.cde/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/bmi-for-age.htm>



### *What About Physical Fitness?*

While overweight and obesity figures are increasing along the Gold Coast, physical fitness levels are decreasing. The situation is especially worrisome among children.

In the 2001 California Physical Fitness Test (*Fitnessgram*), over one-third of our pre-teens and teens ranked as physically unfit. The children were tested on an aerobic walking and running test in grades 5, 7, and 9. The number of unfit children was higher in the older grades.<sup>3</sup>

Fitness of Children in Grades 5, 7 and 9  
2001 Fitnessgram  
**GOLD COAST ASSEMBLY DISTRICTS**

California Assembly	Counties in District	% Overweight	% Unfit (aerobic test)
District 33 – Maldonado	San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara	25.5	35.6
District 35 – Jackson	Santa Barbara, Ventura	26.5	38.5
District 37 – Strickland	Ventura, Los Angeles, Kern	21.6	34
District 38 – Richman	Ventura, Los Angeles	22.5	34
District 41 – Pavley	Ventura, Los Angeles	25.1	35.7

### *Trouble Ahead!*

Children are now being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, a condition formerly known as adult-onset diabetes and typically seen in middle age. Twenty-five percent of U.S. children age 5-10 have high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or other early warning signs for heart disease and diabetes.<sup>4</sup>

### *Gold Coast Risks and Reality:*

- In California, two-thirds of all deaths result from four diseases that are closely related to fitness and nutrition – heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes.<sup>5</sup>
- Other conditions impacted by overweight include: gallbladder disease, arthritis, sleep and breathing problems, low self-esteem and depression.<sup>6,2</sup>

*One in three U.S. children born in 2000 will become diabetic unless many more people start eating less and exercising more. The odds are worse for black and Latino children: nearly half of them are likely to develop the disease.*

*Dr. K.M. Venkat Narayan, Diabetes Epidemiologist, CDC June 15, 2003*



- Nearly a third (30.6 percent) of the Gold Coast population is Latino.<sup>7</sup> It is vital to develop culturally appropriate guidelines to address diverse diets and lifestyles.
- 12 percent of the Gold Coast residents, including 18.6 percent of Gold Coast children, live in poverty, adding hurdles for families to access healthy foods like fruits and vegetables.<sup>8</sup>
- Physical activity has decreased, especially in unsafe neighborhoods.<sup>1</sup>

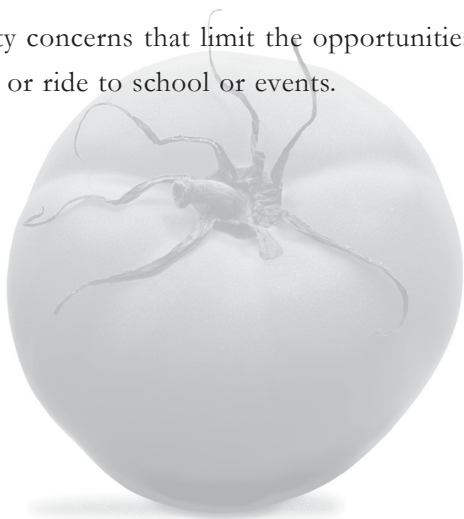
### *Costs:*

- Poor diet and physical inactivity in California are claiming about 33,000 lives annually.<sup>8</sup>
- Poor diet and physical inactivity cost the state an estimated \$24.6 billion each year in related medical and lost productivity costs.<sup>9</sup>
- An estimation based on population numbers suggests that as many as 6,174 deaths in the Gold Coast can be attributed to poor diet and physical inactivity each year.<sup>10</sup>

## CAUSES:

The high prevalence of overweight and physical inactivity is caused by many individual, social and environmental factors. The childhood overweight epidemic is made worse by a social environment that includes these factors<sup>3</sup>:

- Increased portion sizes for foods and drinks.
- Increasing consumption of fast food and soft drinks.
- Lack of funding for nutrition and fitness programs and curricula.
- Saturation advertising of high-sugar, high-fat foods to children and their families.
- High availability and consumption of soda and other high-fat and/or high-sugar foods in schools.
- Lack of physical activity opportunities in school and in communities.
- Limited access to fruits and vegetables in low-income communities.
- Safety concerns that limit the opportunities to walk or ride to school or events.



## GOLD COAST COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

The following organizations share a vision in which everyone in the Gold Coast communities enjoys an environment that supports healthful eating and physical activity.

American Cancer Society • Cal Poly University, Food Science and Nutrition Department • City of Santa Maria, Recreation and Parks Department • Community Action Commission, Santa Barbara County • 5-a-Day Power Play! Campaign, Gold Coast Region • Migrant Education, Santa Barbara County • Nutrition Network Program, Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties • Office of Education, San Luis Obispo • Partners for Fit Youth Coalition, Santa Barbara County • Project LEAN, Gold Coast Region • Public Health Department, Santa Barbara County • Public Health Department, Ventura County • Sansum Medical Research Institute • Sansum-Santa Barbara Medical Foundation Clinic • Santa Paula Elementary School District • Teenage Parenting Program (Cal Learn, Adolescent Family Life Program), Santa Barbara County • University of California Cooperative Extension • Ventura County Chronic Disease Prevention Partnership • Ventura Unified School District

*Funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Stamp Program, an equal opportunity provider and employer, through the California Nutrition Network. For more information about the California Food Stamp Program, please call 1-800-952-5253.*



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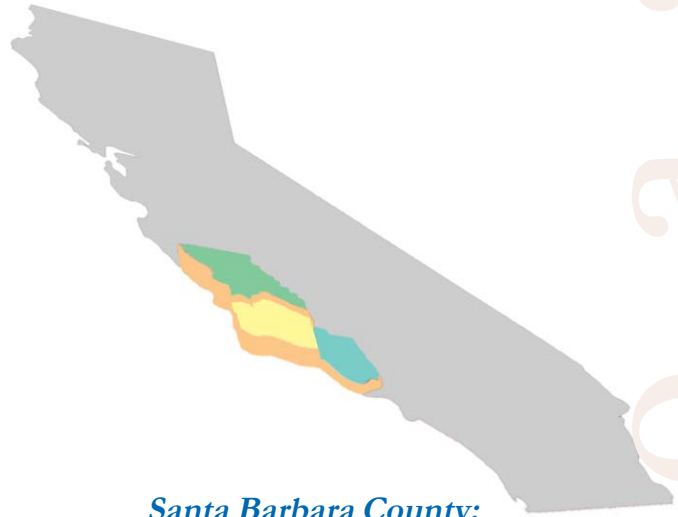
## A County-by-County Snapshot of the Problem

### *San Luis Obispo County:*

- 18 percent of low-income children ages 3-4 years old were classified as overweight based on height and weight measures taken as they entered the Head Start Program in 2002.<sup>11</sup>
- Fitness and Overweight: Over one-third of the children tested in grades 5, 7, and 9 were unfit and over one-fourth were overweight for the 2001 Fitnessgram.<sup>3</sup>

### *Ventura County:*

- 25 percent of low-income children ages 3-4 years old were classified as overweight based on height and weight measures taken as they entered the Head Start Program in 2002.<sup>12</sup>
- The national Healthy People 2010 objective is 5 percent. In 2001, 21.2 percent of low-income children age 5-19 years old were overweight.<sup>13</sup>
- Fitness and Overweight: Over one-third of the children tested in grades 5, 7, and 9 were unfit and 21-25 percent were overweight for the 2001 Fitnessgram.<sup>3</sup>



### *Santa Barbara County:*

- 18 percent of low-income children ages 3-4 years old were classified as overweight based on height and weight measures taken as they entered the Head Start Program in 2002.<sup>14</sup>
- Fitness and Overweight: Over one-third of the children tested in grades 5, 7, and 9 were unfit and one-fourth were overweight (2001 Fitnessgram).<sup>3</sup>
- About 28 percent of students in one Santa Barbara high school are overweight or at risk for overweight.
  - A prior survey in sixth and seventh grade students found that overweight was significantly higher in those who watched two or more hours of television per day or consumed three or more soft drinks per day.<sup>15</sup>
  - Preliminary analysis of data collected in the high school indicate that the findings there will be similar.<sup>16</sup>

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## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

These recommendations from the Gold Coast Collaborative are intended to change the factors that contribute to childhood overweight in our environment.

### Convene a Forum

- The Gold Coast Collaborative requests that our state, county, city and community leaders convene local forums of experts and stakeholders in 2004 to identify strategies to address the obesity epidemic in our children.

### Address Children's Environments

- Ensure that schools, preschools, and after-school programs provide healthy food options, quality physical education, and facilities for active play.
- Eliminate marketing and sales of high-fat and/or high sugar foods and soft drinks from all these settings.
- Discontinue exclusive soft drink and fast food contracts with school districts and parks and recreation departments.
- Promote safe routes for walking and biking to school.

- Incorporate nutrition and physical activity education standards into core curriculum.
- Develop and enforce nutrition and physical activity policies in school districts.
- Promote workplace nutrition and physical activity policies, especially in school, government, and health organizations, where adults model healthy behaviors for our community's children.

### Implement and Enforce Laws

- The California Department of Education should enforce state laws mandating 200-400 minutes of physical activity every 10 days in grades 1-12.
- Schools of middle and elementary levels should implement the nutrition standards established by SB19 (Escutia), which was signed into law in 2001.
- Implement AB 1886 (Jackson) establishing double traffic fines in school zones to improve safety for children to walk/bike to school. Revenue from fines will be directed to hiring crossing guards. This requires county and city signs and law enforcement. The law applies only to the counties of Ventura, Santa Barbara, and Alameda and will be evaluated in 2007.

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